

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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TAGS: PINT, CO
SUBJECT: POLITICAL SUMMARIES: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY: U.S. INDEPENDENCE DAY WAS GREETED BY WARM AND FRIENDLY REACTIONS FROM THE PRESS AS WELL AS INDIVIDUAL COLOMBIANS. AN UNOFFICIAL CHURCH REPORT CRITICIZING POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND MORAL ASPECTS OF COLOMBIAN LIFE CAUSED CONSIDERABLE DEBATE AMONG ECCLESIASTICAL AND POLITICAL LEADERS. THE FINANCE MINISTER SPOKE APPROVINGLY OF COLOMBIA'S RECENT ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE DESPITE CONTINUED INFLATION PROBLEMS AND THE CONGESTION OF A MAJOR PORT. GUERRILLA VIOLENCE CONTINUED IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, WHILE THE NATION'S CITIES REMAINED RELATIVELY CALM. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESS PRAISES U.S. ON INDEPENDENCE DAY. BOGOTA'S LEADING LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE NEWSPAPERS CARRIED VERY FAVORABLE EDITORIAL COMMENT ON THE U.S. AND ITS SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT
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ON THE FOURTH OF JULY. THE LIBERAL "EL TIEMPO" REFERRED TO PRESIDENT CARTER'S RETURN TO THE "FERVENT SPIRIT OF INTER-AMERICAN COOPERATION, UNDER A STRICTLY DEMOCRATIC CONCEPT OF SOLIDARITY," WHILE THE CONSERVATIVE "EL SIGLO" PREDICTED THAT RATHER THAN DECLINING IN POWER, THE U.S. WOULD CONTINUE TO LEAD THE WEST. THIS AMICABLE SPIRIT WAS REFLECTED IN THE EMBASSY'S WELL ATTENDED INDEPENDENCE DAY RECEPTION (BOGOTA 6294).

3. CHURCH STATEMENT STIRS DEBATE. A WORKING DOCUMENT, CRITICIZING SOCIAL, ECONOMIC POLITICAL, AND MORAL ASPECTS OF LIFE IN COLOMBIA, WAS LEAKED FROM THE BOGOTA PREPARATORY MEETING OF THE LATIN AMERICAN BISHOPS'S CONFERENCE (CELAM). THE CONFERENCE STATEMENT PROVOKED BOTH PRAISE AND CRITICISM, THE LATTER ESPECIALLY FROM POLITICIANS WHO OBJECTED TO THE CHURCH'S UNFAVORABLE COMMENTS ON THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES WHICH ALLEGEDLY CONCENTRATE POLITICAL POWER IN THE HANDS OF A FEW AND IMPEDE THE EMERGENCE OF NEW POLITICAL GROUPS. THE REPORT'S CRITICISM OF LOCAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS IS ALSO HARSH, CONDEMNING CONCENTRATION OF WEALTH, THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS, AND THE NOTABLE INADEQUACY OF THE FUNDAMENTALS OF LIFE FOR THE MAJORITY OF COLOMBIANS". COMMENT: COLOMBIA'S TOP CHURCHMEN HAVE EMPHASIZED THE UNOFFICIAL NATURE OF THE REPORT WHICH FAILS TO REFLECT THEIR GENERALLY CONSERVATIVE THINKING.

4. FINANCE MINISTER SATISFIED WITH ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE. FINANCE MINISTER PALACIO RUDAS ANNOUNCED A SERIES OF FAVORABLE PRELIMINARY ECONOMIC INDICATORS, IN BOTH THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL SECTORS, FOR THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 1978. INTERNATIONAL RESERVES ROSE \$200 MILLION WHILE NON-TRADITIONAL EXPORTS WERE UP 20 PERCENT. INFLATION WAS FAR BELOW THE FIRST HALF OF 1977. AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION WAS GOOD AND FOOD PRICES WERE RISING SLOWLY. PRIVATE SAVINGS WERE DOUBLE THE ANTICIPATED LEVEL. TAX LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RECEIPTS ROSE 30 PERCENT, CONSTRUCTION WAS BUOYANT; AND THE STOCK MARKET VOLUME INCREASED BY 20 PERCENT. THE ONLY CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON, ACCORDING TO THE MINISTER, WERE A HEFTY BUDGET DEFICIT OVER THE FIRST SIX MONTHS AND LARGE COFFEE STOCKS WHICH COULD BE AUGMENTED SIGNIFICANTLY BY AN EXPECTED HARVEST OF TEN MILLION SACKS.

5. INFLATION RATE IN JUNE UP ONLY SLIGHTLY. ACCORDING TO GOC FIGURES, JUNE'S PRICE INCREASE OF 2.6 PERCENT PUSHED THE ANNUAL RATE OF INFLATION UP SLIGHTLY. OVER THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 1978, PRICES ROSE AT A SEASONALLY ADJUSTED ANNUAL RATE OF 17.7 PERCENT. THE JUNE INCREASE WAS LED BY SOME FOOD ITEMS, THE MISCELLANEOUS SECTOR OF THE MARKET BASKET AND RENTS. ON A GEOGRAPHIC BASIS, PRICES ROSE SHARPLY (SIX PERCENT) FOR WORKERS IN BARRANQUILLA WHILE BOGOTA PRICE INCREASES WERE LOWER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE.

6. BUENAVENTURA PORT CONGESTED: THE PRESIDENTS OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INDUSTRIALISTS AND THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EXPORTERS RENEWED THEIR ACCUSATIONS OF DEPLORABLE CONDITIONS AND INTOLERABLE DELAYS AT THE PACIFIC PORT OF BUENAVENTURA. OF PARTICULAR CONCERN WAS THE DELAY IN OFF-LOADING EQUIPMENT

DESTINED FOR DISPLAY AT THE BOGOTA INTERNATIONAL FAIR (JULY 15-30). IN THIS REGARD, MOST OF THE EXHIBITORS IN THE US PAVILION ALREADY HAVE THEIR MERCHANDISE OR ARE SHIPPING IT BY AIR. ANOTHER MAJOR CONCERN, AND A MORE CHRONIC ONE, CONCERNS THE TIMELY EXPORT OF THE COFFEE CROP. THE MANAGMENTS OF THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS AND OF THE COLOMBIAN PORT AUTHORITY HAVE COME UNDER HEAVY FIRE, WITH SOME CALLS FOR A COMPLETE REORGANIZATION OF THE PORT'S ADMINISTRATION.

6. GUERRILLAS REMAIN ACTIVE IN COUNTRYSIDE; CITIES ARE RELATIVELY CALM: THE FOURTH (SANTANDER) AND FIFTH (ANTIOQUIA) FRONTS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC) CONTINUED THEIR LONG-HELD POLICY OF INTIMIDATING THE LOCAL POPULACE BY ACTS OF TERRORISM. SINCE JUNE 25, 8 FARMERS AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ONE LOCAL LIBERAL PARTY LEADER HAVE BEEN MURDERED AS "ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE". BOGOTA'S RELATIVE CALM WAS MARRED BY THE EXPLOSION OF A LOW-POWERED BOMB IN THE MINISTRY OF LABOR, WHILE IN CALI A PROMINENT INDUSTRIALIST WAS KIDNAPPED BY UNIDENTIFIED INDIVIDUALS. RIOHACHA, THE CAPITAL OF THE GUAJIRA, RETURNED TO NORMAL WITH THE REMOVAL OF STRICT SECURITY MEASURES FOLLWOING LAST WEEK'S MURDER OF 3 SOLDIERS AND 2 CIVILIANS, APPARENTLY BY CRIMINALS. THE PENCHANT OF THE POLICE TO SHOOT FIRST AND ASK QUESTIONS LATER MAY BE CURBED FOR A WHILE AS A RESULT OF CHARGES AGAINST 12 NATIONAL POLICE OFFICIALS FOLLOWING THE INVESTIGATION OF AN APRIL SHOOT-OUT IN BOGOTA DURING WHICH ALL SIX SUSPECTS WERE KILLED (BOGOTA 3782).
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